

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01

ACDA-05 MC-02 IO-11 OMB-01 ARA-06 SAM-01 AID-05 /097 W

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7368

SECDEF WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

OSD/ISA

S E C R E T LIBREVILLE 0226

OSD FOR COLONEL KERSEY

E.O. 11652: XGDS1

TAGS: MASS, MILI, PFOR, GB, AO

SUBJ: US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO GAVON

SUMMARY: BONGO CALLED TO INQUIRE ABOUT STATUS OF US
MILITARY SURVEY REPORT AND TO INFORM US HE HAS ACCEPTED
UNDEFINED SOVIET OFFER OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT. PRESIDENT
APPEARS TO BE HEDGING HIS BETS AS ANGOLA SITUATION WORSENS,
BUT STILL PREFERS WESTERN SOURCES FOR NEEDED ARMS.
ACTION REQUESTED: USG RESPONSE IF POSSIBLE PRIOR BONGO'S
RETURN FROM VACATION ON FEBRUARY 20. END SUMMARY

1. PRESIDENT BONGO CALLED ME AFTERNOON FEBRUARY 3 TO
INQUIRE AGAIN ABOUT STATUS OF SURVEY TEAM REPORT. IN
REPLY, I REITERATED TO HIM APPROXIMATE TIME FRAME FOR
PREPARATION AND CONSIDERATION OF REPORT, AND TOLD HIM
THAT NO WASHINGTON DECISION WAS LIKELY BEFORE MID-
FEBRUARY AT EARLIEST.

2. PRESIDENT GROANED AUDIBLY AT THIS NEWS (WHICH HE
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HAD HEARD BEFORE), COMMENTING THAT SITUATION IN ANGOLA

WAS GOING FROM BAD TO WORSE BOTH MILITARILY AND DIPLO-
MATICALLY. RECOGNITION OF MPLA BY SIERRA LEONE AND
CAMEROON THREATENED TO TIP BALANCE STILL FURTHER, AND
RUMOR THAT ZAIRE MIGHT BE CONSIDERING COMING TO TERMS WITH
MPLA WAS FURTHER CAUSE FOR CONCERN.

3. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, THE PRESIDENT SAID, THE SOVIETS
HAD COME TO SEE HIM AGAIN TO RENEW THEIR OFFER OF ARMS.
THEY HAD INVITED HIM TO SEND A MILITARY MISSION TO DISCUSS
WEAPONS PROCUREMENT, WHICH HE HAD DECLINED TO DO. THEY
HAD THEN ASKED HIM TO TELL THEM WHAT HE WANTED, IN REPLY
TO WHICH HE ASKED FOR "A LITTLE OF THIS AND A LITTLE OF
THAT". WHEN SOVIETS REQUESTED THAT HE SPELL OUT HIS WISHES
IN WRITING, THE PRESIDENT CONTINUED, HE DID SO, AND IS
NOW WAITING TO SEE WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

4. PRESIDENT TOLD ME HE HAD CALLED FRENCH PRESIDENT GISCARD
D'ESTAING ("WHO SHARES OUR VIEWS ON SUCH MATTERS") TO
INFORM HIM OF LATEST SOVIET APPROACH, AND LATTER HAD
COUNSELED "PRUDENCE". BONGO TOLD ME HAD HAD ASSURED
HIS FRENCH COUNTERPART THAT GABON WOULD NEVER PERMIT
ITSELF TO BE BOUGHT OR BLACKMAILED BY SOVIETS IN RETURN
FOR ARMS ASSISTANCE.

5. COMMENT: PRESIDENT DID NOT SPELL OUT TIME FRAME OF
LATEST OFFER IN HIS PHONE CONVERSATION, BUT IMPLIED IT
HAD BEEN MADE WITHIN PAST SEVERAL DAYS. HIS REPORTED
READINESS TO ACCEPT SOME SOVIET MATERIAL SUGGESTS THAT HE
TOO IS BEGINNING TO FEEL SOMEWHAT ISOLATED ON ANGOLAN
ISSUE, AND MAY BE TRYING TO HEDGE HIS BETS. TO THIS END,
GREATER RECEPTIVITY TO OFT-REPEATED SOVIET OFFERS PRE-
SUMABLY APPEARS TO HIM AS FORM OF PROTECTION" AGAINST
POTENTIAL HOSTILITY OF HIS SOVIET-EQUIPPED NEIGHBORS. NONE-
THELESS, PRESIDENT CLEARLY WISHES AVOID SERIOUS INVOLVEMENT
WITH SOVIETS AND PREFERS CONTINUE LOOK TO WESTERN NATIONS
AS PRIMARY ARMS SOURCE. THUS, RATIONALE FOR US ARMS
PACKAGE, BOTH AS VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF WESTERN SUPPORT AND AS
FULFILLMENT OF CLEAR PLEDGE, REMAINS UNCHANGED.

6. PRESIDENT WILL BE AWAY FROM END OF THIS WEEK UNTIL
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APPROXIMATELY FEB. 20 (VACATIONING IN FRANCE). WOULD HOPE
WASHINGTON CONSIDERATION OF SURVEY TEAM REPORT WILL LEAD
TO DECISION WHICH I CAN HAVE READY FOR PRESIDENT ON HIS
RETURN. STEIGMAN

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